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—
Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

I want to extend to everyone here a very warm welcome.

This meeting, colleagues, is called pursuant to Standing Order 108. It is to receive the May 2008 report of the Auditor General of Canada. The committee is very pleased to have with us today the Auditor General herself, Sheila Fraser. She is accompanied by Mark Watters, assistant auditor, Doug Timmins, assistant auditor, and Ronnie Campbell. These people have been with us many times before.

Ms. Fraser, I want to welcome you to the committee. I understand you have some opening remarks, and I now turn the floor over to you.

Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are pleased to be here today to present our May 2008 report, which was tabled in the House of Commons on May 6.

As you mentioned, I am accompanied by Assistant Auditors General Ronnie Campbell, Doug Timmins, and Mark Watters.

The report addresses a variety of issues that affect Canadians. We have also presented an overview of our special examination practice for crown corporations and for the first time the key findings of recent special examinations.

[Translation]

In a special examination, any major weakness in a corporation's key systems and practices that could prevent it from safeguarding and controlling its assets or managing efficiently, economically or effectively is reported as a significant deficiency.

Since we last reported on Crown corporations in 2000, we have seen a marked decline in the number of corporations with significant deficiencies.

[English]

We are pleased at the improved results we are seeing in crown corporations, and we hope that presenting annual summaries of our key findings will be useful to parliamentarians.

Let me turn now to results of our performance audits, starting with the government's management of fees charged to the public and industry.

[Translation]

In 2006-07, federal departments and agencies reported collecting about \$1.9 billion in fees for anything from a passport to a license for manufacturing pharmaceuticals.

The fee charged for a good, a service or the use of the facility must take cost into account. We found that Parks Canada is a good example of fee management. Its entry fees are based on the full costs of the related programs.

On the other hand, we found that some federal organizations do not adequately consider cost and, in fact, some do not know the cost.

[English]

As well, the total amount collected from a fee for a service should not exceed the cost of providing that service. In Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, however, we found that for a number of years, revenues from the consular services fee, which is part of the charge for an adult passport, exceeded the costs of the activities set out in the Treasury Board approval.

One of our audits looked at the support provided by National Defence for the Canadian Forces' deployment to Afghanistan. We found that National Defence has been able to deliver its equipment and supplies to troops in Afghanistan who need them; however, there have been some delays in moving supplies to Afghanistan.

[Translation]

We also found that some key equipment has been difficult to maintain because of a shortage of spare parts. Also, the supply system does not provide enough information to track the arrival and whereabouts of ordered items. This has resulted in losing track of some items needed for operations.

So far, the military has been able to adapt and adjust so that operations have not been significantly affected but, unless the problems we found can be resolved, the Canadian Forces could have increasing difficulty supporting the mission.

[English]

Another chapter of the report looks at Transport Canada, which is in the process of changing its approach to the oversight of air transportation safety, a requirement of the International Civil Aviation Organization. This means that Transport Canada's focus will shift from traditional oversight, such as conducting inspections and audits, to assessing the safety systems that aviation companies themselves have in place.

Although Transport Canada deserves credit for being the first civil aviation authority in the world to introduce regulations for this new approach, we found weaknesses in several areas.

[Translation]

We found that in planning the transition, the department did not formally assess the risks involved in the change or forecast the cost of managing it. Nor has it measured the impact of shifting resources from traditional oversight activities to the new approach.

The first part of the transition affected 74 airlines and aircraft maintenance companies. The rest of this transition process would be more complex to manage with over 2,000 smaller companies affected.

We hope our recommendations will help Transport Canada to complete this change successfully.

[English]

In this report, we also look at the first nations child and family services program of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Government policy requires that services to first nations children on reserve meet provincial standards, be reasonably comparable with services for children off reserve, and be culturally appropriate.

Funding for the services needs to match the requirements of the policy. We found that the department does not take sufficient account of these requirements in establishing levels of funding for first nations agencies to operate child welfare services on reserves.

[Translation]

The Department's funding formula dates back to 1988. It has not changed significantly to reflect variations in provincial legislation and the way child welfare services have evolved. In addition, the formula assumes that all First Nations agencies have the same percentage of children in care and that the children all have similar needs.

In practice, the needs of children in care who are served by First Nations agencies vary widely. The outdated funding formula means that some children and families are not getting the services they need.

• (1110)

[English]

We turn now to the Public Health Agency of Canada, created in 2004, and now responsible for leading federal efforts in the surveillance of infectious diseases. Well-informed and rapid public health actions based on effective surveillance can prevent and contain outbreaks, reduce the economic burden of infectious diseases, and ultimately save lives.

[Translation]

We found that while the Agency has surveillance systems in place, weaknesses in some aspects of surveillance have remained since we last reported them, in 2002. For example, except for Ontario, the Agency has no formal protocols or data-sharing agreements with the provinces and territories.

Formal agreements would help ensure that the information that the agency receives is timely, complete and accurate so that it can better respond to a disease outbreak.

One of our audits examined the maintenance of official residences. These residences are more than housing provided to the country's senior government leaders. They are part of Canada's heritage and need to be preserved.

[English]

We found that the National Capital Commission has improved the condition of most official residences in recent years, although further work is needed at Rideau Hall. However, the Prime Minister's residence at 24 Sussex Drive has had no major renovations for 50 years. The National Capital Commission estimates that completing the needed work would require full access to the residence for 12 to 15 months. It has a schedule for the planned repairs, and delays are likely to result in further deterioration and higher costs.

[Translation]

Finally, let me turn to our chapter on the Canada Border Services Agency. Since its creation in 2003, the Agency has been responsible for detaining and removing individuals who enter Canada illegally or who pose a threat to Canadians.

We found that the Agency has made progress in certain areas but it needs better processes for detentions and removals to ensure that individuals are treated consistently.

[English]

The agency does not monitor its detention and removal decisions across the country to ensure that they are consistent. We also found that it does not collect and analyze enough data at a national level to properly manage detentions and removals. The agency has improved its tracking of individuals. It has established a database of 63,000 people with removal orders, and it knows the whereabouts of 22,000 people who have been ordered to leave Canada. Although a growing number of people might still be in Canada illegally, the good news is that the agency is focusing its available resources on the higher-risk individuals.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chair. We would be happy to answer your questions.

[Translation]

We will now be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Fraser.

We're going to have one round of seven minutes.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and welcome back, Madame Fraser.

I'd like to begin with chapter 4.

It appears to be a heart-wrenching situation, as you have noted. Perhaps the most vulnerable in Canadian society are children, especially children on reserve. You've noted that this particular analysis looks at the 8,300 children in care. Does that 8,300 number encompass just those who are in the care of child welfare agencies run by first nations, or does it encompass all the children?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, it would be all the children on reserve who are receiving child welfare services.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay.

That's the total number of children. It's also noted that the funding to provide the services for these children in care is \$450 million. Is that \$450 million for all children in care, or is it strictly what goes through Indian and Northern Affairs to the first nations agencies that are providing the care?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, about \$270 million of that \$450 million goes to directly support children in care. The other \$180 million is for the operations, including prevention, of the child welfare services for first nations.

• (1115)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Perhaps I wasn't properly understood. Is that \$450 million for all those 8,300 children? While a sizable portion—for instance, in B.C., you noted, it's 65%—are in the care of first nations child welfare agencies as opposed to provincial agencies, a significant portion are being cared for by provincial agencies. Is the \$450 million for all, or is it strictly earmarked for the first nations agencies?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. That would be the total expenditure for all those children, including expenditures that could be made by provincial agencies.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: When we do the numbers on this for last year, it turns out to be about \$54,000 per child. That's a tremendous amount of resources being dedicated per child in care. Yet we look at the circumstances these children often find themselves in and it's troubling in the extreme. And we don't have any method to analyze the results.

Your report indicated that there is no follow-up on children once they leave care—how they succeed or don't succeed in society—or even, in fact, on how agencies compare to other agencies within provinces, the first nations agencies, and how they are performing in their provision of services. There is no data.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: There are two elements in response.

First, for the 8,300 children in care, the comparable figure would be \$270 million for their care. The \$180 million is for operations, including, for example, operations of first nations agencies that can be providing other services to other families, without the children necessarily being in care. For example, it may be for preventive work with families and children, but the children still remain with their families.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: That drops the number to a minimum of about \$35,000 to \$36,000-plus, because a portion of that other amount would also go to this type of care.

What would be the comparable number if you compared it to other agencies that provide child welfare services to children in the general public?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I'm afraid we don't have that information. You might want to ask the department if there was a hearing on that.

In response to your previous question, you are correct that there isn't any good outcome information. I should note that this is not particular to INAC and first nations children. This appears to be a problem more generally across the country with these kinds of services. There have been reports. There was a report, actually, quite recently, in British Columbia, that pointed to the lack of good outcome information for these types of services.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I'll continue with this chapter and then maybe move to another, if there is still some time remaining.

You had in particular noted in paragraph 4.22 cases that are problematic in the extreme. In one first nation, 14% of their children were in care. Could you provide us with the name of that particular first nation? What are the underlying circumstances? What are the underlying socio-economic circumstances in that particular first nation that have led to this horrific number? The number for all first nations is 5%. That is eight times the rate in the Canadian public. We're talking about a rate that is 22 or 23 times the general rate in the population. What is the particular situation on this reserve?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, I would prefer that the department answer that question. They would have that kind of detailed information, which we don't have.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Chair, could we make sure we get some of that information? Perhaps we could discuss that a little later.

Moving on to chapter 7, if we take a look at table 7.5 within that chapter, we notice that between 2005-06 and 2006-07 there was a significant jump in the number of removals in Canada of 11.2%. At the same time, there was a 30% increase in detainees, so we're vastly increasing the number of people who appear to be rounded up and put in detention, but the numbers don't match. There is an 11% increase in removals but a 30% increase in detention.

I've come across particular cases. One that I feel free to mention is the Tabaj family, where a mother was removed from a hospital and taken to—

• (1120)

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I'm not exactly sure where Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is going, but to bring some tragic situation of any particular family into the public domain at this point in time I'm not sure is appropriate.

The Chair: Do you have permission, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Yes, I do, and in fact this particular case has been widely reported in the media in Toronto. It is once again a horrific case and a clear example—

The Chair: I'll allow you to go ahead, but your time is up, so this has to be a brief question and a brief answer.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay, just to finish, because I was interrupted by Mr. Williams, in this particular case a mother was removed from the hospital. There was no space in the regular detention facility. She was taken to Milton, to a criminal facility, put into a cell with someone charged with assault—a woman who had tried to kill someone with a knife—and was detained there for weeks.

How many of these sorts of cases have you come across?

We have this huge surge in the number of people being detained. We don't have the detention facilities. What percentage of that 30% increase is being put into criminal facilities, such as the one I just mentioned?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, in exhibit 7.2 we indicate the number of detainees who are held in municipal or provincial facilities, and that number has gone up just slightly in 2006-07. So there were 3,563 people who had been detained for some period of time in a municipal or provincial facility.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

Monsieur Laforest, vous disposez de sept minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In passing, Ms. Fraser, I want to congratulate you for strongly protecting your independence. You have had to postpone advertising for a hiring process because you wanted clearly to express your independence from the government. I thank you for having held to your position and I congratulate you.

My question relates to Chapter 2. At page 2, you refer to some of the concerns from commanding officers about weaknesses in the supply chain but you add that you did not find any reports of such problems in the supply chain. I find it troubling that there would be no such reports because, later in the document, you state that the military has lost track of \$7 million worth of equipment, which is significant. I find it disquieting that there would be no reports on those concerns that were expressed to you.

What were the concerns of commanding officers?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, commanding officers talked about some delays in getting spare parts as well as their inability to get some spare parts. They also told us that, in some cases, they have had to cannibalize other equipment in order to be able to carry out repairs and that some pieces of equipment were very old and difficult to operate. However, they did not mention any serious consequences on operations and we did not find any such mentions in the reports.

I should also mention that the team went to Kandahar and interviewed people there who told them that they were managing to muddle through, for example by manufacturing spare parts or by using parts that were not exactly those they would wish to use. As we mentioned in our report, that is not viable in the long run.

About the \$7 million worth of equipment that they could not track, we believe that the problem is due to the fact that they are using a manual system over there. Parts and equipment are kept in containers, not in warehouses, for example. While carrying out their stock-taking, they could not find that \$7 million worth of equipment but, on the other hand, they found \$6.6 million worth of items that were not in inventory.

• (1125)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Perhaps, but one does not compensate for the other.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It shows that there is a problem with equipment control and stock-taking. The possibility that they have equipment on the ground is rather high but if they are not sure or cannot find it, they might place new orders that should not be placed.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: If one is able to determine that \$7 million worth of equipment is missing, one should be able to tell what exactly is missing. That figure is based on the value of equipment that has been ordered. Would that include machinery, weapons, pharmaceuticals, major tech stuff? You said that they have had to cannibalize some equipment to carry out repairs. Is it this type of essential equipment that has disappeared or has not been delivered?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I have no details with me, Mr. Chair. If there is a parliamentary hearing, you might want to put the question to the Department. However, I can tell you that medical supplies and ammunitions are kept in separate warehouses.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: I would like to have more details on this matter. You were able to establish that \$7 million worth of equipment could not be found. One should be able to check against the orders to see what was not delivered and what the value was. It is by adding everything that you get your \$7 million.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, that is a question that should be put to the department.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: I believe we should do so, Mr. Chair. It is very worrying. Some equipment has not reached the base but we seem to be unable to say if it is because it has disappeared on the base or has never been delivered to the base. Is it conceivable that there could be some type of black market? I believe we should really look at that seriously. Of course, we hope that is not the case but, to be sure, we need more detailed information.

I was asking earlier why there were no reports on that from commanding officers. I raise the question. I believe a more detailed report should be prepared in order for us to be able to assess the scope of the problem.

As to Chapter 4 and the whole issue of Child and Family Services for First Nations, you said that a significant agreement has been negotiated with the province of Alberta, which will lead to a 74% or 75% budgetary increase. You know what the living conditions are elsewhere where there is no agreement.

Considering the situation elsewhere, especially in Quebec, do you believe that, as soon as there is an agreement—and we all hope it will be soon—there will be the same significant budgetary increase? That would mean that those services are really underfunded at the present time, which is one of your findings by the way.

•(1130)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I believe it would be reasonable to presume that in the other provinces the situation is the same as in Alberta. As we mentioned, the funding formula is outdated. It has not been changed significantly for over twenty years and for some very long periods did not even include any cost escalator. Furthermore, it does not take account of changes in provincial legislation and standards nor of the way services have evolved.

These days, we tend much more to offer preventive services in order to avoid taking children from their families but that is not taken into account in the funding formula. Under the existing formula, we give an amount to a program instead of really looking at the needs in order to set the funding level according to those needs.

It is imperative that the formula be reviewed. The government has let it be known that the approach used with Alberta is a model to follow and it seems rather optimistic about that. Of course, we will keep looking at progress made in this area and we hope that the Government will get good results, with performance indicators demonstrating real improvement.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Laforest.

[English]

Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

Mr. Poilievre, seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you for being with us.

I'd like to ask about chapter 7, "Detention and Removal of Individuals—Canada Border Services Agency". You referred to roughly 41,000 deportees of whom we have lost track. Some of them may be in Canada and some might have left without exit records. I know we don't have good exit records for these people, and that is one of your criticisms of the system, but do you have any estimate of how many might have left?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That is really up to the agency to do that kind of analysis and develop that work. At the time of our audit, they didn't have an estimate of that.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

That 41,000 includes some of the 36,000 in your 2003 audit. Is that not the case?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The numbers are a little confusing, Mr. Chair. When we did the audit in 2003, there was no such database, so we did an estimation of the increase in the number. The 36,000 was the increase in the number of illegal immigrants in the country. We simply compared warrants that had been issued on known departures over six years. So it is difficult to know. We didn't actually have a base number.

The agency has actually done a lot of work to be able to put this database in place. It shows that there are 63,000, but we don't know what the starting number was. That number of 36,000 was probably high, because again, people may have left the country without having reported to the agency.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So explain the difference between the 41,000 and the 60,000.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The 63,000 is the total number of people who have warrants outstanding against them. The agency knows the whereabouts of 22,000.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: It knows the whereabouts but has not necessarily removed them.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I'm sure the agency will tell you there are a number of reasons they sometimes can't remove people. They either can't get the documents to remove them, or it's not safe to remove them to their country, or various other reasons. That would be up to the agency to explain. But they do know the whereabouts of 22,000, and there are a further 41,000 they do not know the whereabouts of.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: With respect to the 41,000, when did that list of individuals accumulate? Was it in the last five years, or is a cumulative number going back a long time?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It is potentially a cumulative number going back quite a while, though the agency did do a review of all the warrants and removed any warrants from the system that were quite old and outstanding. I believe they removed something like 10,000 warrants, which could be an indication that these people may have left. This is obviously over a long period of time.

•(1135)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: What costs do Canadian taxpayers incur because of the presence of 63,000 illegal immigrants in this country? Are there costs in terms of social welfare, policing? Are there costs that we, as taxpayers, are incurring, or is it really not of any cost to us at all?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I have no information on that item.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Do you know if they would be eligible to receive any sort of health care insurance, for example, if they were to become sick?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I'm afraid I don't have that information.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

You mentioned that the Canada Border Services Agency and Citizenship and Immigration Canada were successful in removing 1,900 criminals. That was over what time period?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I believe it was over a year.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: All right, that was a year. I think it was in the last year.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I think it was a year.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, because they were part of the 12,000-plus illegal immigrants who were removed.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's right, it would have been within a year.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Was that the biggest number ever?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Well, if I look at exhibit 7.5, in 2006-07 there were a total of, roughly, 12,600 removals, of which 15% were criminals. The number of removals was the highest it's been in five years—and I believe it was probably the highest ever. So, yes, I think it would have been the highest.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So would that have been the highest specifically for criminals as well?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Do we know how these 41,000 people were lost? How is it that they go from being illegal immigrants whose whereabouts are known, to illegal immigrants whose whereabouts are no longer known? Is it that we no longer have a current address for them? What definition are you using in finding this list of 41,000?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: People don't know their whereabouts; they don't have a current address for them. Most of them would be failed refugee claimants, and that process can be quite long and they could have moved over that time. They were not detained because they were not viewed as a threat to the country, so we simply don't have an address for them.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So after the refugee process failed, we lost track of them?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes, that's right.

Now, the agency might be able to give you better information about that whole process and how that happens, but I would think, essentially, that's probably the major reason.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Did they offer you any statistics on the rate of commission of crime amongst this group of illegal immigrants?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I know we made some mention in the report of them at times committing crime, but I don't believe we have any overall information on that. I don't believe that's information the agency itself would track.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Did they offer you any explanation as to why this number—which would appear to be quite large at 41,000—has been able to grow? I'm not asking you to speak for them, but in their presentations to you, did they suggest it's because these people were hiding or because they had just forgotten to report that they—

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I don't have that information.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: No explanation. Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Christopherson, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you again, Madam Fraser. You and your team have done another great service for the Canadian people. We thank you for that.

I want to begin with Indian and Northern Affairs' first nations child and family services program.

Every time we deal with this, two things happen. One, it's complicated and very difficult to understand because it's so unique in terms of how it's operated within the Canadian federation. Second, it's always absolutely mind-boggling and distressing beyond belief what we as non-aboriginal people continue to allow to go on, on the reserves.

If anybody wants to get some idea of the core of why there's so much unrest and trouble in the country, just follow the trail of the Auditor General's reports alone. We've had reports on treaties and the nightmare there and how long and delayed they've been. It's unacceptable, as stated by every caucus here. The education reports are a nightmare again. They're only getting a fraction of the service

we're getting elsewhere in Canada. Health services are abysmal, and now we have a report on social services.

At some point we have to start doing something more than what we're doing. Our normal goal is to get ahead of the curve on big problems, but we just don't seem to have long enough arms to get in front of this curve. I don't even know where it is.

I want to ask you two things.

One, are there other ways for us to assess the services, the quality of life, in a broader way that brings all this together and could help Canadians understand what's going on, how unacceptable it is, and how the rest of the world looks at it, so that we could start to have buy-in from the rest of Canada to actually get serious about things? I'll leave that one with you. Is there another way rather than just the piecemeal one?

Secondly, I ask your opinion—and, Chair, I leave this with the committee as an idea: maybe from now on we need to start holding joint meetings with the Indian and northern affairs committee to assist us in getting through it. We spend an awful lot of our time asking questions. I won't say it's deliberate, but we end up doing a lot of running around and a lot of learning of civics lessons about how all these things work, and then we run out of time. If we had the benefit of our colleagues who work with this every day, maybe we could pierce through here and get to the core issues a little more easily.

What are your thoughts?

• (1140)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure where it's at, but there was an initiative that was under way a few years ago to try to get sort of broad performance information on quality of life, the overall health indicators and poverty indicators. There was a process that had been under way at that time. I honestly don't know where that's at, but we can certainly go back to look at it.

We refer in many of these reports as well to the royal commission report that came out several years ago. It had many of those broad indicators and many recommendations in it. That might be something as well, if the committee wanted to get into more of a study, to pick that up and see what's actually been done with some of those recommendations.

Mr. David Christopherson: That would take us to the Kelowna accord.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No, I mean the royal commission on aboriginal peoples.

Mr. David Christopherson: We need something, Chair, because doing this is piecemeal. We're not getting the job done. We're able to identify, and we all agree on these things, and it's infuriating, tragic, and horrible, but then 12 months later another report comes along and reinforces the same message. It's a blight on our nation, and we need to do something far more serious than we've done.

Let's move on to crown corporations. Again, this is just a structural question. We get these once a year. You do the audits constantly and report them back to the crown corporations themselves. You put them on your website, and once a year we get a summary.

Is that correct, or can you clarify that for me?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's not quite it. Every year we do a financial audit of the financial statements of the crown corporations. These are special examinations that are carried out once every five years under the Financial Administration Act. They are very extensive audits that are obviously much broader than simply the financial aspects of the crown corporations.

Up until recently—in fact this still continues—the reports have gone to the boards of directors. There is no requirement in legislation that these reports be made public or that they be tabled in Parliament. In Budget 2004, government indicated that they were going to put in a requirement, but that has not actually come to pass. Since then, all of the crown corporations have been posting their reports on their websites.

Due to the interest of this committee and other committees in some of these special examinations reports and parliamentarians' questioning why they weren't made aware of them, we have now decided to publish the summaries of the special examinations that we have conducted within the past year. In this case, we've done a little more—about a year and a half's worth. So you, parliamentarians, will be informed of the key findings of each one of the special examinations through our annual reports.

Mr. David Christopherson: Does that leave us a little stale-dated? Do we run the risk that we're a little behind by the time we get around to it? You could have five or six crown corporations in a report that already has five or six or seven chapters.

• (1145)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's potentially so. We do make the point that these reports were to have been made public and tabled in Parliament, and the requirement has not been put into force. That is something the committee might wish to look at.

Mr. David Christopherson: Would the clerk be sure to bring that item back for us for discussion, please?

I know I'm going to run out of time soon, but I'll move on to Canada Post. You're doing an audit right now of Canada Post, but the government has announced that they're reviewing the entire mandate, and a report is to be tabled by the end of the year. As well, we have Bill C-14 currently in the House; it would have a major impact on the revenue sources of Canada Post. It really is starting to privatize it; it's watering down the exclusive privilege that exists right now for all mail so that Canada Post doesn't cost taxpayers any money.

With both of those things happening at the same time, will there be any significant impact on your audit and its relevance?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: On the financial audit, obviously not. On the special examination, it's potentially possible. We would potentially look at some of the same issues that a mandate review would look at, though, of course, our examination is done taking into account the mandate as it has been given to the crown corporation.

We have had many cases—one would be CATSA, for example—in which there was a mandate review while we conducted our audit at the same time. The two reports were complementary in a way, because the mandate review can go into much broader issues, and we would flag certain issues as well, and then government and Parliament could take all of that into consideration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I've run out of time—public health, air transit safety...

The Chair: Before we go to Mr. Lee, I just want to clarify something that arose during that question: with regard to the special examinations, did you indicate that in 2004 the government directive was that the crown corporations were to post the special examinations on the website?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: In the budget of 2004 there was an indication that government was going to bring in a requirement through, I believe, the Financial Administration Act that crown corporations would table their special exams in Parliament and would make them public. That particular requirement does not exist. There was never any follow-through on that, but the crowns are posting them on their websites voluntarily.

The Chair: So as far as you're concerned, all the crowns are putting them on their website, but they're not tabled in Parliament.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's correct.

The Chair: With your plan to do this annually, you will actually be reporting the summary of the special examinations to Parliament but not the actual special examinations themselves, which are available on the website.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Thank you.

I noted your report, in chapter 1, on the management of fees. It's good; it reads well.

About 15 years ago, the Financial Administration Act opened up a new way of charging fees. This, for the bureaucracy of government, is of course a vehicle to charge fees and bring in revenues. At another committee of the House, the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, there's been an ongoing running battle over fees. As you point out, the revenue from fees is not supposed to exceed the costs of the program. One of the agencies we chased was Parks Canada. I note you gave them a reasonably good mark, even though they charge fees for entry when the statute that governs them says that Canadians have a right to use the parks; we can't figure out, if there's a right to use the park, why they feel they can charge a fee. But that's kind of a theoretical thing that goes on.

We may be looking for your guidance here. A recently decided Supreme Court of Canada case approved Parks Canada's charging a percentage on the alcohol sales in Banff National Park restaurants. The committee felt that was a tax. The Supreme Court of Canada accepted that it was a fee. The bureaucracy is pushing the envelope here.

There's another case now, which will probably go to the Supreme Court, involving the Broadcasting Act, the broadcasting licence fees. The committee found that millions of dollars of excess revenue over the costs of managing the licences constituted a tax. That will likely go to the Supreme Court now.

The committee has forced the agencies to give back fees or give credits where they've charged illegally in the past. The problem we're running into now is that whether this is a fee or a tax, how do we resolve this problem where the government wants to charge like a tax? For example, for the broadcasting licences, they charge the part II fees, or millions and millions of dollars, where it only costs them about one million dollars a year, or half a million, to run the thing.

How are we supposed to deal with that in Parliament? And how will you come to deal with it as you look at the appropriateness of a fee when it's not a tax? If it's a tax, Parliament will approve it. But a fee is not approved by Parliament; it's simply struck by the bureaucracy.

• (1150)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: As we point out in the report, there are two kinds of fees. One is based on the costs. For example, the consular fees, which we mentioned, shouldn't exceed the costs of providing those services. There are other fees, though, that are based on the value of the good or the opportunity that is being provided through, for example, a licence.

In the report, we mention licences that are provided to fishermen where the fee that is being charged takes into account the value of the catch. You're providing someone with an economic right, if you will. Those fees should be based not on the costs necessarily of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to manage this process but on the value of the right you're giving to this individual or corporation.

What we're saying in the report is that for many of these fees, government doesn't know—hasn't updated or doesn't know—either the actual costs when it is a cost-based fee or the value of the right that is being conferred. For example, if we talk about catches, the values of catches have significantly changed from when the fee was originally established. That needs to be updated to see if it is still reasonable. In fact, the values of some catches may have gone down whereas others have gone up.

So there are the two kinds of fees. We've looked to try to see how the departments are establishing their costs and whether they have good management systems in place. Most of them in this audit did not. They didn't take into account the full cost of the services they were providing. It doesn't mean they necessarily have to charge the full costs of the services, but they should at least know. It should be an element that they consider.

Mr. Derek Lee: Then it would be really helpful in our law if, when we passed it, we clarified the two different types of fees. I mean, in the absence of a really clear legislative base for this fee-charging, which is causing some confusion, and in an effort to protect the citizen from unjustified excessive fees....

Anyway, that would be a parliamentary approach, I think, but it would conflict with the administration where you have bureaucracies intent on raising revenues however they can get their hands on them.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The other point I would add, too, is that we make note in the report of the User Fees Act and of the fact that there have been very few fees. Under that act, any new fee or modification to a fee goes through quite an extensive process, including a parliamentary process. There are very few fees that have gone through that process, and in fact all the fees that were in place at the time the act was passed are grandfathered, if you will, or not subject to it. So there may be something there as well.

We think there needs to be a review done of some of the issues around the act and consideration given perhaps to modification.

Mr. Derek Lee: Yes, that was an initiative of a private member that actually worked out rather well. It was the member for Etobicoke North.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Williams, you have seven minutes.

Mr. John Williams: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Before I ask my questions, Madam Auditor General, there is another question. A few weeks ago there was a little controversy over your being required to follow the communications programs of the Government of Canada. Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is going to be bringing forth a motion that you table these regulations. Do you think it's appropriate that you do that, rather than that we go directly to the PCO?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, there is a communications policy in force, and it is actually on the government website. I'd be quite glad to print it off and send it to you and tell you what I think are the problems with it.

• (1155)

Mr. John Williams: Maybe Mr. Wrzesnewskyj should get that on his budget.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: There are conditions within that communications policy that apply to all officers of Parliament and that we think are not appropriate. I would be more than pleased to give my analysis of that to the committee.

Mr. John Williams: So basically you're saying that if it's already on the website, a motion to produce it is a little bit moot?

Mr. David Christopherson: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Give us your point of order, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll be very quick. Did we not already deal with this motion before, that we have a briefing coming from the Auditor General on this issue that would include background material?

The Chair: It really wasn't a motion, Mr. Christopherson. Actually, I believe it was you who put the question. The Auditor General herself agreed to provide the information. It didn't really require a motion; it was a question. She agreed to provide it. We don't have it yet. I assume we're going to get it.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj has tabled a motion, which we will deal with later in the meeting, that deals with the same issue. The motion is in order, so it's—

Mr. David Christopherson: But I thought I asked you the question whether there should be a motion, and you said no, it's taken care of and she'll bring it in. Let's not get caught up in procedure, but I thought we already did it.

The Chair: The way I handled it was that you asked the question and she agreed to do it. Based upon that, there was no need of a motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

Mr. John Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Moving on to other issues, Mr. Poilievre was asking about illegal immigrants. My question is, can illegal immigrants get a social insurance number in this country?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I really don't have the answer to that, Mr. Chair. The agency might be able to tell you that.

Mr. John Williams: Okay. So they could be working and beavering away here in Canada and earning a good living, when they actually should be leaving the country because we don't want them here. Maybe they say that because they're paying their taxes, everything should be fine. But I think the first thing we need to know is whether these illegal immigrants can get that number. That would be one way to find them, because they wouldn't be able to work. I'm surprised the department wouldn't have that information.

On the issue Mr. Lee raised on the fees charged, we have programs in which they are supposed to recover the fees but not make a profit as such. I think it was a number of years ago that the Department of Agriculture was charging fees for the approval of animal feed, which of course CFIA would presumably regulate.

But if they had 10 applications in a year, they would charge 10% of the cost, and if they had 100 applications in a year, they would charge 1% of the cost. It seemed a rather strange way of conducting business per se; it was an arbitrary amount based on the number of applications from competitors as to the amount of fee they would have to pay. Is this a reasonable way to do business?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, we really didn't look at that, so I feel uncomfortable commenting on it, though we would certainly expect any department to have good systems in place to establish the fees and to have done some consultation in advance. In most cases, the fees established going forward are not done on an ad hoc kind of basis depending on the number of applications that come in.

Mr. John Williams: On the other issue Mr. Christopherson raised, of the dreadful situation for our children on first nations, and it is a dreadful situation and needs to be addressed, do you see any correlation between the problems there and the problems the children are being faced with—marital breakdown, family breakdown, and so on—with corruption on the reserves and the money not actually being spent as it should be spent?

I think of the Hobbema reserve just outside Edmonton, which has all kinds of oil and gas royalties. The people in senior positions are being paid extremely well, and yet we have third world living conditions right on the reserve, just outside Edmonton, and it's not for lack of cash.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, we really didn't get into that kind of analysis of the issues on first nations. It's quite clear in our report, though, that money is not the only issue in this. This is a very

complicated and complex subject. It has a number of variables that affect the outcomes of these children.

Mr. John Williams: Transport Canada—air transportation safety, which is a concern for all of us, especially MPs, since we travel so much—and the International Civil Aviation Organization that's headquartered in Montreal and sets the rules have now decided, you're telling us, that Transport Canada will not monitor the safety of...I presume it's private aircraft. We're not talking commercial aircraft, are we?

• (1200)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Commercial.

Mr. John Williams: It is commercial? So they will no longer conduct the safety for commercial airlines, but they will monitor an airline maintaining its own safety regulations. Is that correct?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: They are promoting the use of the safety management systems and ensuring that the airlines and the maintenance companies themselves have proper systems in place to ensure safety.

The regulator's focus on oversight is on assessing these systems. The regulator can always carry out inspections or audits as it wishes, but it is a move to putting more emphasis on safety management systems.

This has happened in other areas. It has happened notably in rail and, I would even advance, in food safety. The whole HACCP program is the same kind of approach, and it is seen as being a better way of using resources to target the higher-risk areas.

Mr. John Williams: Do you feel comfortable with this new process?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We have not done an assessment of this new process. I believe we have an audit planned to do a work in agriculture on food safety and to see how successful the HACCP program is there. Obviously, it's just in transition here for air safety. I think it would be up to the department to explain how it believes that would be a more beneficial system.

Mr. John Williams: I'm a little concerned about air traffic safety. Is it a recommendation or a regulation by the International Civil Aviation Organization? Do you know?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I believe it is a requirement.

Mr. John Williams: I certainly hope somebody believes this is adequate, Mr. Chairman. If a plane falls out of the sky and Transport Canada says it's not their problem, they don't monitor safety any more, I think the Canadian public is going to be rightly upset.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I don't think we should jump to the conclusion that because they're changing the way they do the oversight, they don't regulate safety. They still do.

Mr. John Williams: I appreciate that.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It's putting more emphasis, though, on the companies themselves to have the safety management systems in place.

Mr. John Williams: With regard to the atomic energy report, I was a little concerned with what you said, and this is for the regulator:

In addition, the regulator withdrew its service of providing the Corporation with a pre-licensing assessment, citing resource constraints, thus putting the Corporation at a competitive disadvantage...

—and so on.

Why would a regulator, regulating the nuclear industry here, have a shortage of resources?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Mr. Chair, I think it was really the expertise and the technical resources to be able to assess nuclear reactors. There are not a lot of people in this country who can do that kind of work, according to what the regulator told us.

Mr. John Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williams. Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

Colleagues, we're now starting round two. We can go five minutes.

Mr. Wrzesnewskij, you have five minutes.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to the issue of not really knowing how many people are in the country illegally or who these individuals are. This is the second time this has come up. It came up a couple of years ago, I guess, when we were dealing with the whole issue of social insurance numbers. The number approached a million, I think, at that time. There were more social insurance numbers in the country than what our population seemed to indicate should be out there. So we have no idea if we're dealing with a number of 20,000, 200,000, or 400,000. Is that correct?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: If you're referring to people who are in the country illegally, no. The department knows the number of warrants that are outstanding against individuals, ordering them to leave the country. That database contains 63,000 names. Some of those people may no longer be in the country. They may have left voluntarily and not informed the agency. And the agency knows the whereabouts of 22,000 individuals.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: These are people for whom there are warrants—people who have gone into the immigration system, gone through the applications, got turned down. But there are a lot of people who come into the country under a visitor's visa and stay on, and we have no idea what those numbers might be. So when it comes to people who are potentially illegally in the country, that's just one component. And then we have the issue of social insurance numbers—there are hundreds of thousands more numbers than potential workers.

At one time, the whole question of exit controls was raised. We're probably one of the only western countries that still hasn't put in place exit controls, a monitoring device. When people come into the country, we go through a passport control. It gets noted. But we don't do it on the other end, when people exit the country.

Has there been any attempt to take a look at what the cost would be to implement that type of regime?

•(1205)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: If so, I am not aware of it. That would be a question to ask the government.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I just note that this is a gaping hole in our system. At the same time, we've invested resources that are quickly approaching \$1 billion to provide handguns to the officers, but we haven't provided them with the tools to know how many people are here illegally.

Over the last year, under the current minister, we've had an increase in removals of 11.2%. However, criminal removals have increased by only 4.3%. We've increased the percentage of removals overall, but the percentage of criminal removals is only one-third of the total. Has there been an actual allocation or prioritization? I would think most Canadians would be interested to know whether an effort is being made to remove criminals, as opposed to people who are here with their families, etc. Was there any indication that this type of prioritization is taking place?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes, we noted in the report that the agency was focusing its resources on the higher-risk individuals, as we would expect. I wasn't sure where the member's numbers came from. In exhibit 7.5, we note that in the last year about 15% of the removals were criminals. In the previous year, it was about 16% of a lesser number. I haven't done the actual calculation, but I would think that it's probably pretty close.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: In 2005-06, there were 1,817 criminal removals. In 2006-07, there were 1,895 criminal removals, a 4.3% increase. During the same time, the overall removals are 11,362 and 12,636, respectively. That's the 11.2%. If they are prioritizing that component, it's a diminishing return that we seem to be getting.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Could Mr. Wrzesnewskij point out where he's pulling those numbers from?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I've had to use different tables, but I used exhibit 7.5, the one just referenced. The figures 1,817 and 1,895 are in the Auditor General's report. I didn't reference the chapter, so the member would have to read the whole report to find those numbers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: That was a point of order.

The Chair: No, you were out of time before the point of order was made.

Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Do you have any comments, Ms. Fraser?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. I would just add that I think that's a question for the agency.

As to the removals, I'm not sure that one can draw those kinds of comparisons. If it's a whole family, there could be many more people on one removal. So I'm not sure that it's necessarily fair or correct to jump to the conclusion that it's a question of diminishing returns.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, five minutes.

•(1210)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): I wasn't clear on the crown corporations. Would the Trudeau Foundation have been one of the groups that you would have studied with your audit?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. The foundation is not a crown corporation. It's considered a foundation, which government has funded.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I was just thinking that under chapter 7 it might have been a good thing, with the Trudeau Foundation, that there was a grant issued to somebody just to draw the connection between the 41,000 illegal immigrants in the country and the Pierre Trudeau legacy, to see if there was some connection between the two. But I guess we can't follow that path.

Mr. Ivison, with the *National Post*, was rather descriptive in describing the complex system we have in Canada for dealing with illegal immigrants and refugees. I think he made some sort of comment that Stephen Hawking would have found it very challenging himself to understand and appreciate the complexity of the system we've created in the country to deal with illegal immigrants. In some ways I think maybe the immigration consultants would almost see this as a gift from heaven for them, but I'm not exactly sure for the Canadian citizen that it's a gift from heaven.

Do you agree that the process that exists, that has accumulated over the years, is a fairly complex system of procedures to deal with illegal immigrants?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Well, I would agree, Mr. Chair, that there is a fairly complex system of immigration into the country. People, obviously, were claiming refugee status in a number of avenues available to them, for example, to appeal decisions, etc. But that is of course both a combination of government policy and of legal rulings that have been made over time.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Auditor.

On the chapter dealing with aboriginal children.... I have a federal penitentiary in my riding. The last time I checked with the warden of the facility, I think something in excess of 70% of the inmates in the penitentiary were of first nations or aboriginal background. I know there are people out there who would criticize the court system and the justice system for the high rate of first nations in the penitentiary. I disagree with them.

To me, this is a symptom of a much greater problem than the justice system. It's like blaming the barometer for the weather, as far as I'm concerned, to blame the courts. I have worked in the court system, and I do believe that 99% of the people who are in penitentiaries are there because the evidence was there and they committed a crime. So it's a symptom of a much bigger problem, a failure of a system quite literally for a group of people.

Using the same approach here, if we have eight times the number of aboriginal children who are pulled out of their homes and put into foster care or other facilities and so on, one way you could interpret that is that the people who are removing children from the homes are being arbitrary and aren't using the same approach they would use in non-native homes or off the reserves. I guess the other interpretation is the same sort of problem we have with the high conviction rate for aboriginal people. Is this more a symptom of a much larger, complex social problem, or is it an indictment against the end part of the process, the people who have to deal with the social problems?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Obviously the question is very complex, and there are a number of factors that would affect children who require these services. I would add, though—and I'm not sure that we've actually explicitly said it in the report or that we would be able to demonstrate proof—that we have to question if the way the funding from the federal government is given to agencies does not itself have an impact upon the way services are provided, in that the federal government will pay the costs for children in care but will not necessarily provide sufficient funding for preventative care. So the way to get care for children is to take them into care.

The way the funding is actually done may have a perverse effect to actually have increased the number of children who are in care. Perhaps if the funding formula is reviewed and takes into account the way provincial standards have changed in the way these services are delivered in provinces, one could perhaps question whether there would actually be more children and their families receiving preventative services, and then those children would not be taken into care.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

The next questioner is Mr. Lussier. Before I go to him, I understand Mr. Laforest wants to recognize and welcome the group we have in the back of the lobby.

Mr. Laforest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to mention the presence of students from the Fernand-Lefebvre high-school from Sorel. They are visiting the Parliamentary Precinct with their MP, Mr. Louis Plamondon.

Welcome to all of you.

You wanted to see how a parliamentary committee operates. I can tell you it is extremely interesting. You are now at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and our witness is Ms. Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General of Canada. I wish you a good visit in Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laforest.

Mr. Lussier, for five minutes.

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Fraser, I would like to come back to the famous Chapter 2. At paragraph 2.30, you state that "over \$7 million of items could not be located". Is that an estimate for one year or an amount taking account of all the orders placed since the beginning of the mission?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That is based on the inventory from the beginning, which includes all items coming in and coming out and the situation at a given date.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: At paragraph 2.32, you state that the number of contract personnel has increased significantly. Do you have any data about the number of contract personnel in proportion to the number of troops in Afghanistan at this time?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Exhibit 2.1 shows the number of support staff. I could perhaps provide you with more detailed information but I believe that the support staff has tripled. In paragraph 2.10, we say that the number of support personnel has tripled between May 2006 and July 2007.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: So, it is impossible to say that there is a relationship between the arrival of contract personnel and the disappearance of equipment and ordered items.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That is right. As a matter of fact, more contract personnel is being used for equipment maintenance and supply functions.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Do you know if contract personnel has to have a security clearance?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I could check but I suppose that anyone deployed in Afghanistan must have the proper security clearance.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: I would like to come back to the question I asked yesterday about Chapter 1. In your report, the \$1.9 billion of fees charged are detailed up to an amount of \$661 million, which leaves a gap of \$1.2 billion.

Which are the main departments charging those fees? If you could come up with a total amount of \$1.9 billion, you must have received detailed information from all the departments. Could we get the list of the main fees charged by departments and agencies?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes, Mr. Chair. In the next few days, we will provide the committee with a detailed list for the \$1.9 billion amount.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Excellent.

Any additional questions?

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: You said that the \$7 million of missing equipment or items not received do not represent a single delivery but is a cumulative amount for several years. Does this not confirm the theory—and I underline that it's only a theory—that there is a black market? If the amount was related to the disappearance of a complete inventory, we might say that an order was not delivered or was lost somewhere on the way but if there is \$100,000 worth of equipment missing with each delivery... Is that a possibility?

• (1220)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Obviously, the gap may be due to this kind of situation but we believe that it is mainly due to the fact that people use a manual system in Kandahar. They receive 85 tonnes of equipment each week and each item has to be coded. If there is a coding mistake, they will obviously not be able to find the item and...

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: But that only reinforces that theory.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I agree but we also say in the report that they have found another \$6.6 million of items, which means that the problem is really due to coding and follow-up issues. They do not know what is in the containers until they open them.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Could we get a report from the Canadian Forces about that \$7 million? That amount is surely related to specific items.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The committee would have to ask National Defence.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Does that mean that it is up to the Public Accounts Committee to put the question to DND?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Chair, since this obviously raises a question, we should ask the Department to give us a detailed list of the missing items, especially considering that the Auditor General has said that commanding officers did not report any missing items from their inventories or their orders.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Laforest. We'll put that on the agenda for Monday's steering committee meeting.

If the committee decides to have a hearing on this particular chapter, the Department of National Defence will be notified to provide that information in advance. If we decide not to have a hearing, we will be asking for that information for circulation within the committee.

Mr. Lake, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mike Lake: I would like to talk a little bit about chapter 7, but I would like to start by giving some background on why I think it's important.

My riding is a very immigration-heavy riding, and I oftentimes have constituents come visit me because of problems they've had with temporary resident visas. They've been turned down, and oftentimes we're dealing with a situation where it might be a grandparent, for example, wanting to come for the birth of their first grandchild, or something as important as that. Sometimes we're dealing with temporary foreign workers—unattached young adults who want to come as temporary foreign workers.

In both cases, the main reason we hear for the denial is insufficient ties to the home country. In other words, they don't believe they're likely to go back, or they're at least a risk, I guess, not worth taking to accept these applications. There's enough of a risk that they might not go back. Of course, the number of resources required to remove somebody and go through the entire legal process if someone decides to stay are so great that it hinders the process.

When we deal with this issue of being unable to remove people who break the rules, what we're really doing is hurting people who are willing to follow the rules, or probably willing to follow the rules through this process.

The second problem, of course, is queue jumping. In permanent resident applications, there is a backlog. If the perception is that it's easy to come here and stay and there aren't going to be efforts taken to remove somebody, I think it creates an increased incentive to jump the queue by coming here illegally, and that's a real challenge.

First off, I'll follow up on Mr. Wrzesnewsky's question about temporary resident visas. I think I know the answer. Does the 41,000 or 63,000 people we're talking about not include people who have come here on a temporary resident visa and have simply not left after their six months?

•(1225)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Potentially it could, if there has been a warrant issued against that person. It's the numbers of warrants outstanding, ordering people to leave the country, and that could be for a variety of reasons with those forms.

Mr. Mike Lake: But because of this lack of exit controls, in most of those cases we wouldn't know whether they left the country or not, correct?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's correct, if they have not informed the agency that they have left or are leaving.

Mr. Mike Lake: For someone coming on a temporary resident visa, there would be no reason for them to inform the agency. So for the most part, that would not even calculate into the numbers we're talking about, and I would think those numbers could be fairly significant.

Was there any work done or any study done on the average length of the process, from someone landing here in Canada to the culmination of legal proceedings and the coming into force of a removal order—the average timeframe?

The reason I ask about that for background is that oftentimes what we see is a case where someone comes here and goes through the entire process of trying to get refugee status, which can take him or her many years to go through—four, five, six years, or longer—at which point that person is turned down. They have been turned down early on but have gone through appeal after appeal.

I think of a case in my riding of a family in which, after four years, the kids were fairly established in their high school and university. It becomes very difficult at that point to go through the process.

Was there any study done on the average length of the process? If we can cut down that process in terms of time, it might solve the problem to some extent.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We did not look at that specifically. I'm not sure whether the agency would have that kind of information. They might, and that would be something to ask them.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay.

On the lack of exit controls, again, Borys talked about our exit controls being substandard compared to other countries, or non-existent compared to other countries. Those are his words.

Is there any indication of a comparison? Have you done any work comparing what we do in terms of exit controls with what other countries do in terms of exit controls?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. That is not the kind of work we would do, because we really consider that to be a question of policy.

Mr. Mike Lake: It's another question for the department perhaps.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It's not really a question for us to look at.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay.

In terms of resources, is there any indication that simply increasing resources would have a corresponding effect on the backlog? Let's say that the 22,000 cases in the working inventory are ready for removal. We know who they are and where they are. It says that in 2006-07 we actually removed 12,600 people. If we simply,

for example, doubled the resources committed to this, could we remove another 12,600 people out of that 22,000?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I think we can presume, Mr. Chair, that if resources were increased, the number of removals would probably also increase. But to what extent and by how much, I don't know. I don't have that kind of information. The agency might be able to give you a better estimate of how additional resources would have an impact, and they could perhaps talk about some of the difficulties they would have actually locating some of the 41,000 people they don't know the whereabouts of.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

Mr. Christopherson, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm thrilled. I didn't realize we were going to have time for a second round. That's great.

I'd like to move to chapter 3, "Oversight of Air Transportation Safety".

There are 99 million passengers. As has been pointed out, a lot of us in this room are part of that 99 million. That's a lot of people.

You said in your initial tabling that "Although Transport Canada deserves credit for being the first civil aviation authority in the world to introduce regulations for this new approach, we found weaknesses in several areas", and "The rest of this transition process will be more complex to manage, with over 2,000 smaller companies affected".

My understanding is that they've gone to a new system. I'm not all that thrilled about the new system, but it's a little late for that. If I understand it correctly, rather than the Government of Ontario providing hands-on inspections and hands-on assurance for the public that safety measures are being met, it's now going to be the responsibility of the airlines themselves. The government will now be responsible for overseeing their systems to make sure they have systems and are doing this the right way, if I understand it.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I would just note that it's Transport Canada, not the Government of Ontario.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry. That's me going back into an old life. I'm not staying sharp enough today. Sorry, I meant the Government of Canada and Transport Canada.

•(1230)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That doesn't mean they will not be doing what they call traditional oversight any more. They can still continue to do the inspections and the audits. It's just that there will be more emphasis on the safety management systems and on ensuring that the companies themselves have systems in place to ensure safety.

Mr. David Christopherson: I don't want to belabour this, because it's already a done deal, but doesn't that sort of create two levels of inspection? It's a little harder for the public to get through.... At least when it was being done solely by Transport Canada there was direct accountability. Now we're once removed from that. We can have systems in place, but are the systems being adequately enforced right down to the...?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No, no. Transport Canada is still responsible for providing oversight.

Mr. David Christopherson: Has that not been weakened at all or watered down?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That has not changed.

The way they do it is somewhat different. If a company does not have safety management systems that are judged acceptable, they should not be allowing that company to operate.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. So we haven't transferred any of that responsibility. We've actually built a secondary area of responsibility. That's making me feel a little better. All right.

Your concern is that they haven't properly identified where the weaknesses would be and where the risks are to ensure that during this transition we don't create a safety hazard.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's right.

In their own management, in the management by Transport Canada of this transition, we have some issues with the fact that they didn't adequately assess the risks. At least we see no indication that they did. There is nothing documented. There are risks around, for example, human resources. The number of inspectors is going down each year. Obviously, the skills the inspectors will require in this new system will be different. What is the plan for human resources, such as the training and the rest of it? As well, there were no additional resources put into Transport Canada during this transition.

So what is the effect on the traditional oversight, which is continuing while they are moving the system? Obviously, the number of audits and inspections has been decreased, just because there are fewer people doing them. Is it at a sufficient level? Have they analyzed that kind of risk? Those are the types of issues we raise.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, given the fact that it's affecting 99 million passengers—some would be duplicates—I would hope that's one of the ones we bring in to look at further.

With time remaining, I'd like to move to the Public Health Agency of Canada. In part, I was a little confused about the audits in 1999 and 2002, given that this entity wasn't created until 2004, but I assume that some of the responsibilities are the same and go back to Health Canada and that you were analyzing those. Is that correct?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's correct.

Mr. David Christopherson: And some of them, had they been fixed, would be a part of the new system.

You say you had serious concerns in 1999 and 2002 and, this being 2008, we still have those same issues unresolved. You know what it does to the current makeup of this committee to have earlier reports pointing things out, especially multiple reports, and the actions not done.

On page 2 of chapter 5, you say, "the Agency has not made satisfactory progress on those related to strategic direction, data quality, results measurement, and information sharing."

What are the implications of those? Why are they so serious in this context?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The agency can only do its work by obtaining data from the provinces, because health is a provincial jurisdiction. The agency needs to get data on a timely basis and needs to get it in a manner that is complete and accurate. There's a question of the standards around the kind of data it wants and the detail it needs to be able to do its work. Certain provinces have raised concerns about privacy issues. Those have not been addressed. So there's a question around the timely provision of accurate and complete data for the agency to be able to carry out its kind of analysis.

As well, we would have expected to see in place protocols around roles and responsibilities in the case of a major outbreak, and those are still not in place. Who calls whom? Those sorts of things should be in place and not be left up to chance when we need them.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm thinking here of another SARS. Are we ready to prevent the mistakes that were made in the last SARS outbreak?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: In fact, we will never really know, if we unfortunately ever have to face that situation, but having these kinds of protocols and clear rules and responsibilities in place will help to at least minimize the risk.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, and thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson, Ms. Fraser.

Mr. Holland, you have five minutes.

• (1235)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Fraser.

I'm going to start, if I can, with chapter 5, "Surveillance of Infectious Diseases", because we haven't had an opportunity to touch upon it.

One of the concerns coming out of SARS in 2002 was about the sharing of information and having formal protocols between the provinces and the federal government to ensure that if there is an infectious disease, we have a rapid response and that information is shared instantaneously. I was disappointed to see that there continue to be weaknesses there.

Can you expand upon those and maybe tell us what response you've received from the government concerning what plans there are to move the formal agreement beyond just an Ontario agreement?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: As I was mentioning earlier, the agency has surveillance systems in place and is receiving most of the information it needs, but it's really on a voluntary basis or at the goodwill of the provinces.

We believe it really needs to have those formal agreements in place, so that it's very clear what information should be shared with the agency. They should address privacy concerns, detail the level of information that's required, and define what standards should be used to provide that information, so that the agency will get the correct and accurate information on a timely basis from the provinces.

As well, we would have expected to see in place protocols with the provinces about rules and responsibilities in case of a major outbreak: who does what and who calls whom and when. Those too have not been formalized.

Mr. Mark Holland: And that could have a serious detrimental impact on response time and the ability of our nation to respond to a major infectious disease.

What response has the government given to these concerns, because it's something that rather jumps out at me?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The agency has agreed to work on this and is doing so. They talk about the obvious complexities of working in a federal-provincial area and the time it takes to put all these agreements in place. We recognize that, but we certainly would have expected that since 2003 there would have been more than one.

Mr. Mark Holland: And they don't have an end date, a timeframe they're working towards?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: They have really not indicated to us an end date.

A new thing, too, is the requirement now of the World Health Organization to provide information on a more timely basis. I believe this comes in, in 2012 or 2013. Canada will have an obligation to provide health information on a very timely basis to the World Health Organization, and if our national reporting isn't efficient, we might not be able to meet those requirements.

Mr. Mark Holland: That's something we may want to come back to.

Because it hasn't come up as well, I wanted to talk about some of the official residences, namely, 24 Sussex. You mentioned in the report that it's in a terrible state. This is a symbol of Canada, if you will, and it's owned by the people of Canada.

I know the Prime Minister issued a statement immediately after your report that he would not be moving out of 24 Sussex. I'm concerned about that, because you mentioned in your report that if there isn't a period of time—12 months or 15 months—that 24 Sussex is not occupied and given over to repairs, it is going to become increasingly costly, that the deterioration will accelerate and we'll be into an even larger problem.

Can you talk to us a little bit about the consequences of not taking action, how much more we may have to pay the longer we put this off, and how grave the situation is?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Obviously, these are estimates and reviews that have been done by the National Capital Commission. They have actually done quite an extensive study of the residence and the repairs that are required there. They are significant. As we mentioned, there have been no major repairs to 24 Sussex for 50 years, and most of the systems are very old and are at full capacity. As well, certain of the areas that are needed for functions, like the kitchens and the laundry as well, are no longer efficient and really need to be updated.

There are costs, of course, associated with the state of the residence right now. The windows, the heating bill—there are air conditioners in the windows that weaken the frames even further and there is a great loss of heat during the winter. There is no immediate

danger or questions of safety for the Prime Minister and his family—that, the National Capital Commission ensures—and the Prime Minister indicated that he had no intention of moving before the next election.

It is really up to the commission and the Prime Minister's representatives to determine a timing that would be appropriate. Given the nature of the repairs that have to be carried out, though, it is quite clear that for their own safety it would be preferable to have the family relocated to another residence for a number of reasons. To live in a house that is undergoing repairs is never fun, but when you have issues like asbestos and all the rest of it, there can be health issues as well.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Holland.

The last question will go to Mr. Wallace for five minutes.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is my pleasure to be here. I'm not normally part of this committee.

Ms. Fraser, it's nice seeing you again. The last time we talked we were talking about accrual accounting or something very exciting.

I want to ask you a really technical question. It's nothing political, in a sense. It's simply for my edification on the fees and how it operates and how your audit works. If I understand what you've written for us here correctly, there is a User Fees Act that came in during 2004. Regarding the fees that you analyzed from the 13 different departments that are in here, you seem to be quite satisfied with six. With others, you thought there could be improvement.

Are you evaluating them on that act, or are you evaluating fees in comparison to that act? My understanding is if there were fees implemented prior to that act, the act does not apply. Am I accurate on that? Can you tell me how you analyzed the fees in relation to that act?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: You are correct that the fees that were in place at the time the act was introduced are not subject to the act. It is only if there is a new fee or a modification to a fee that it would then become subject to the User Fees Act.

Mr. Mike Wallace: The audits you did here are related to new fees, or are they also related to older fees?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Some are new fees as well, and there is actually one in there that is not technically a fee, that is a contract base. That is the charge for medical marijuana.

Mr. Mike Wallace: When you were doing your analysis, because the User Fees Act dictates that it has to be cost recovery and no more than cost recovery, can there be some margin in there? How much overhead can be applied? What overheads can be applied?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: In fact, it is not only from the act. I believe it is as well from government policies, but also from court decisions where fees have been challenged and the court has indicated that there has to be a reasonable relationship between the costs incurred and the fee. If not, if the fee is much higher than the costs, it can then be deemed a tax, and only Parliament can impose a tax.

Mr. Mike Wallace: But do fixed overheads get applied to the fees?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Absolutely. We talk about full costs. Not all departments are calculating their costs, nor their full costs. Parks Canada would, for example, so overheads would be allocated to their costs of service.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Just for my understanding, then, let's take the passport office and consular fees, or whatever you call them. I think an adult application these days is 90 bucks, or something like that. I don't even know the amount, but it's in that range.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It's \$87.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

There's been pressure by people to get their passports, so revenues have increased over the last couple of years. On the revenue side of the equation, there's obviously an influx of cash, and we have increased the overhead somewhat, but overall, the influx of cash may be rising faster than the overhead costs. So when I see your analysis of what the passport office is doing—and they're one of the ones who you think need to do work in terms of evaluating what fees they should charge—does your audit take into account what's happening in the marketplace, in terms of the revenue side being slightly skewed just because there's been a run on passports?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Let me explain those particular consular fees. The fee was approved in 1995. It was for \$25, which was included in the cost of the passport. When the fee was approved, it was very clearly laid out what activities would be included or could be charged for by this fee. To be quite honest, it really doesn't have a whole lot to do with the passport; it is for services provided to Canadians when they travel abroad. For example, I guess the most serious costs that have been incurred lately were for the evacuation from Lebanon and for aid that may have been given to Canadians during the tsunami. So in the fee approval, it listed the kinds of costs and said that Foreign Affairs could not charge for costs incurred on behalf of other departments; it had to be for their own consular costs. What we did was to look at what those costs of services are now, and we found that in fact the revenues from that \$25 fee exceeded those costs.

What probably happened is that when they initially calculated it, they said that the costs of consular services were about \$37 million, and as they were issuing about 1.5 million passports at the time, they came up with a \$25 fee. Obviously, the number of passports that have been issued has gone up a lot. They're still collecting that \$25 fee, but the moneys allocated to cover the costs of the consular services have not increased at the same rhythm. That's why they need to go back and look, I would think, first of all, at the basis of the costs that should be covered by that fee, and then redo the estimates of passports that will be issued, given the new volume.

• (1245)

Mr. Mike Wallace: I see.

My final question, if I have 30 seconds, is that in each section of your report you have the response from the department, which you've printed in your report.

Can I conclude thereby that you accept their answer and agree with the approach they're going to be taking, or are you just reprinting what they said?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We basically print what they say, unless we know there is something inaccurate in what they're saying. Then we indicate to them quite strongly that we would like them to change their response, or we would have to put a rebuttal or rejoinder in the report to indicate that.

What we really look for is this committee, of course, to ensure that they produce detailed action plans laying out how they are going to address this. Because their responses are very succinct, the detailed action plans are very helpful to see how they are actually going to address this.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: On a quick point of order, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj was talking about the number of criminals removed versus the total number of removals, and I think some clarification needs to be made, because he suggested it was contained in the document here. It's not actually explicitly contained in the document; it's an extrapolation of his based on exhibit 7.5.

Just for anyone reading the blues or the evidence from our committee, who might see the numbers he's referring to, I think some clarification needs to be made. If you're going to extrapolate from those numbers, you have to understand that the percentages are based on rounding. We just need to clarify what those numbers are, if you want to extrapolate the number of criminals—

The Chair: Be quick, Mr. Lake, with your point of order.

Mr. Mike Lake: I'll get to the point quickly. I just want to have this clarification.

In 2005-06, based on rounding, it would range from 1,772 to 1,863; and in 2006-07, the number would range from 1,844 to 1,946, based on rounding. So anyone reading this can now actually have some context—

The Chair: That was a point of clarification as opposed to a point of order.

Do you have anything to respond, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I'm just glad that Mr. Lake has now done his homework.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I want to take this opportunity to thank you, Mrs. Fraser, and all the members of your staff, for what I consider to be another excellent report.

Colleagues, the steering committee will be meeting on Monday, and we will be making a recommendation at the committee as to what particular chapters the committee will be having hearings on. Also, we will probably come back with a recommendation as to the draft agenda for the rest of this year at our meeting on Monday. We are also meeting for three hours on Tuesday, starting at 11 o'clock.

Before we go to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's motion, I want to ask you, Mrs. Fraser, if you have any closing comments you want to make.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Chair, I'd just like to thank the committee for its interest in the report. We look forward to hearings with the committee and with departments and agencies on the issues we have raised. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Fraser.

I'm going to go now to the motion that was tabled by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj. I'm not going to read it. It's there in front of you. It's redundant, but it's in order. The Auditor General has already given us assurance that she's going to table that with the committee, and I haven't heard that she's not, but it's not out of order.

Do you want to speak to that? I don't think we should spend a lot of time on it.

• (1250)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: No, I don't think that's necessary, because it's a short and succinct motion. I think it's self-explanatory, and I'm glad the Auditor General has indicated that she will provide the document, but I do think it's important that we formalize it just to make sure, and to make it clear, as a number of the members at the table made clear in their questioning, that we need to stand firm in preventing the PMO from circumventing the ability of the Auditor General and the public accounts committee to hold the executive branch of government to account, and to make it clear that we take quite seriously this attempt, perhaps, at undermining the independence of officers of Parliament.

The Chair: Stick to the wording of the motion. You don't have to get into the debate.

Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

I'd agree that we should codify it in a motion. The only thing I would suggest—and I would present it as a friendly amendment to the mover of the motion—is that it would read, after the end of the word “Parliament” in the motion, “and that the Auditor General provide the briefing note as requested at the committee meeting of April 29, 2008”. That captures all the discussion we had, the variables, because this would be one document, a briefing note that contained a few more of the issues. If we marry the two and move it, it's nailed down nice and clean.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Absolutely. That is a friendly amendment, and it brings everything into context.

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to read it so that everyone is clear.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): From what I understand, the full motion would read:

I hereby request that the Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, table the draft communiqué from the Privy Council Office, which contains the unprecedented attempt by the executive branch of government to vet all communications of the Auditor General, an independent officer of Parliament, and that the briefing note as requested at the meeting of April 29, 2008, be provided as well.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I'll be supporting the motion, but I'm curious about where we're going with it.

I want to quote from Alison Crawford, a CBC reporter on politics, and of course we wouldn't question the accuracy of a CBC reporter:

When I called her yesterday

—this is the Auditor General—

she said she has never been asked to submit any of her public relations materials to PCO, and says she has no fears that will ever happen.

For me, that killed the story, but it continues to pop up today in the House of Commons and it continues to pop up in this committee.

The Chair: Again, I don't think we have to get into the....

Go ahead, Mr. Williams.

Mr. John Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is another situation of Mr. Wrzesnewskyj trying to turn over every stone to see what he's going to find there, and what he's found here is in public view. The Auditor General has already told us this is on the website. It seems rather strange that we would expect the Auditor General to deliver to us something that is on the website because Mr. Wrzesnewskyj just can't be bothered to go and find it for himself.

The second point, Mr. Chairman, is that this is a PCO document, so we should be asking the PCO—not the Auditor General, not the recipient of the document tabled. We should be asking the people who drafted the document to table it, and his language of “unprecedented attempt to vet all communications” I find quite offensive too, Mr. Chairman.

However, because it is on the website and because it is available for every Canadian to read, including Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, if the motion is not out of order, it should at least be withdrawn to show some respect for the system by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

I'll be voting against it.

The Chair: Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I fully agree with the amended motion. It is important to formalize the commitment made by the Auditor General. I congratulated Ms. Fraser for holding firm in the face of the government plan. Public Works is already taking steps to control advertising. This is what the Auditor General told us: “In the House, the government says that it does not apply to us but we want that to be confirmed in writing”. What we are doing with this motion is in full agreement with this process and is quite correct.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1255)

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Poilievre briefly and then to the mover. Then we'll put the question.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Clearly there has been no attempt by anyone in the government to muzzle the Auditor General. Anybody who tried would be cruising for a bruising, as I think all of us know. So this motion is both useless and harmless. I will be supporting it for the latter reason.

The Chair: Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I too will be supporting this harmless motion.

Earlier I did some number crunching for Mr. Wrzesnewskyj. I would be glad to offer my services to help him use Google after the meeting, if he likes.

The Chair: If he needs help he will certainly contact you.

We'll go back to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj very briefly, and then I'll put the question.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: We were quoting from the press in the first two days of this issue, so we'll note that in the press the government was not as forthcoming as they are at the present time. It was only after the backlash that they moved off the position that they would not provide this particular communication. But that's what was reported in the first couple of days.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Before I adjourn, Monsieur Laforest has a point he wants to raise. I believe it has to do with rescheduling the steering committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: After the tabling of the report of the Auditor General, the next meeting of the steering committee will be important because it will be held to set our priorities. I would like that the Monday meeting be postponed from noon to 3:30 p.m.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's okay with me.

Mr. Christopherson, is that okay?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Sweet is not here, but his assistant is. Subject to Mr. Sweet's availability, we will schedule it for 3:30 on Monday afternoon, if that's okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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